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PRIZE COMPETITION IN INTERIOR DECORATION.

MESSRS. JOSEPH P. McHUGH & CO., Interior Architects and Decorators, New York, with the view of encouraging the study of interior decoration after pure styles, offer six subjects for competition in THE DECORATOR AND FURNISHER, beginning with the October, 1890, issue, which also commences the seventeenth volume of our journal. A prize of TWENTY-FIVE DOLLARS will be paid by the above firm, every alternate month during the year, for the best original design in the following special styles of ornamental construction and decorative treatment:

LIST OF SUBJECTS FOR COMPETITION.

October, 1890,	-	A COLONIAL RECEPTION ROOM.
December, "	-	AN ITALIAN RENAISSANCE DINING ROOM.
February, 1891,	-	A LOUIS SEIZE DRAWING ROOM.
April,	"	A ROMANESQUE HALL.
June,	"	AN ADAMS LIBRARY.
August,	"	A LOUIS QUINZE BOUDOIR.

CONDITIONS.

- 1.—Each competitive design must be 15 inches by 10 in size. The drawing must be executed by the pen in black ink, and sent us flat, not rolled up.
- 2.—Each drawing must be original, and should include suggestions for wall decoration, draperies and furniture, after the style of its period, but adapted to modern construction and requirements.
- 3.—Each drawing must be signed with a *nom de plume*, and accompanied by a letter giving the real name and address of the designer. All designs must be addressed to the Editor of THE DECORATOR AND FURNISHER, 150 Nassau Street, New York, and must reach the office not later than the 1st of the month previous to that for which the competition is announced; thus, drawings for the October competition should reach the Editor not later than the 1st of September.
- 4.—A committee of decorative artists (whose names will be announced hereafter) will decide as to which design is entitled to the prize in each competition, as well as those entitled to honorable mention, and their decision will be final.
- 5.—The editor is to have the right of publishing any of the drawings sent in, whether awarded the prize or not.

THE DECORATOR AND FURNISHER.

THERE is a great difference between a house furnished according to the furniture dealer's idea of what is necessary for use and adornment, and furnishings wherein a man of taste has asserted his own individuality. The only possible reason why the modern householder should be encumbered with suites of furniture, heavy sideboards, and the like, is that the professional furniture dealer has a particularly heavy axe to grind. The fashion for stuffed furniture is one of the greatest tyrannies of the age, and besides the articles being heavy and cumbrous, opportunity is given for the substitution of horse-hair stuffing with wood shavings, saw-dust and the like, not to mention the fact that such stuffing is the best of all breeding grounds for vermin. A man of taste will get rid of upholstery stuffing in his furniture as far as possible. Rattan furniture is clean, serviceable, and artistic, and a settee of this description, whose seat is covered with a flat, movable cushion, that can in summer, be stowed away if desired, is a much better article of furniture than the upholstered sofas of the warerooms. In China and Japan, where bamboo furniture is in vogue, some capital sofas are made that furnish models of lightness, simplicity and artistic grace. On the subject of curtains, the man of taste rebels against the cornices and lambrequins, with which such graceful and useful draperies are nowadays overloaded. The ideal curtain is unvariably hung upon a rod with rings, whether for window, archway, or in place of doors. To add anything more to such an arrangement is to gild refined gold, a task no true artist would undertake. In the matter of bookcases, these useful articles of furniture are almost unnecessarily cumbrous in construction. It makes all the difference in the world whether a book is placed upon an open shelf, where it can be reached in a moment, or whether it is placed in a cumbrous glass case, like a piece of bric-a-brac in a museum, to be seen but not touched. The want of simplicity in bookcases is responsible for a tremendous amount of ignorance, just as the unwillingness of women to go to the trouble of dressing themselves for the street, has produced more bodily ailments among the feminine portion of the community than any other cause. In matters of furnishing, simplicity is the best of taste, and is nowhere better expressed than in the furniture and decoration of our homes.

DECORATIVE art in the United States is in a healthy condition, and the prospects of its still more wide-spread diffusion of art ideas extremely hopeful. Since the Centennial Exhibition in Philadelphia, we have made great progress in domestic luxuriousness. Production in many branches of art has increased considerably, and many more people now than formerly are coming to see the real value and importance of art, and to understand something of its principles. It is taking its place slowly but surely in the minds of a great many people as a civilizing influence. People are beginning to love beauty for its own sake, and to insist on having a little grace and comeliness imported into the common objects of life. Domestic architecture has made great strides, decoration is more tasteful, and our furniture is better designed. A growing number of intelligent people no longer think that the function of art is exclusively to produce pictures or statues, or to erect buildings. They understand that it has also the wider mission of adorning and brightening life by transforming everything that will take its impress. The ultimate causes of a spread of taste are always obscure and complex. Art journals are powerful factors in any art propaganda. Individual initiative also counts for much; men of great gifts and enthusiasm both in and out of the ranks of artistic producers, have stirred and stimulated the public interest, and have made art a topic almost as generally interesting as sport or politics. Among writers, Mr. Ruskin, apart from his many eccentric opinions, has, by force of his fervid genius and magnificent enthusiasm, deeply influenced his generation. The awakened taste of the people has influenced manufacturers and improved manufactures have re-acted on our taste. Our daily lives are in an increasing degree, surrounded by pleasing objects. We are more fastidious and more exacting. The great success of certain firms which produce artistic manufactures of various kinds, is a proof of the natural improvement of taste, and their productions help to swell the movement. All our large cities have schools of design, which both prove their interest in art, and help it in its battle against that all-pervading ugliness, which, a few years ago, threatened to engulf us.

All this is very hopeful and encouraging, but it is not enough to love beauty. It is quite as important to detest ugliness, for it is in the toleration of what is ugly, that the shallowness of our care for beauty is revealed. Most people, even with a highly cultivated æsthetic sense, with a great natural love for beauty, intelligently trained, accept and condone ugliness with a painful ease. When the impulse towards beauty is deep and spontaneous, the hatred of ugliness will follow as a matter of course.

713 Nicollet Avenue,
MINNEAPOLIS, MINN., July 22d, 1890.

To the Editor of THE DECORATOR AND FURNISHER.

Sir: It surprises me to read your approval of what you call "realistic" picture frames. The business of framing pictures has been and is a delightful study with me, and I must confess I was somewhat chagrined to find an Art Journal endorsing these frames, which are to me an abomination. As I understand it, the office of a frame is, first, to protect a picture, and, second, to remove it from its environment. If so, are not these frames in their very nature obstructive? For example, a picture of the sea, and a frame on which is a two foot oar. Does not this decoration (?) emphasize the fact that this picture is but paper and ink—or canvas and pigment? Here is a picture of a lion after Bonheur—noble King of the Desert! but, forsooth, around him is a conspicuous frame plainly saying this is but a picture. To me the result is atrocious—the sentiment, the art, is gone, and instead we have a curious, catchy piece of mimicry—a lion behind quarter inch bars, not simply painted in perspective, but actual brass wire! Am I not right? I am ready to be convinced if I am wrong. I should like an answer.

Yours truly,
Harrington Beard.

IT is well for art that its manifestations are not limited to what pleases the fancy of a single individual. The mere diversity obtained through the various historic styles, is art's most priceless possession, for by means of the different methods by which nations, as well as individuals, have given birth to art ideas, we are the better able to grasp the illusive intellectual energy which is the only real element in all works of art. An idea, instinct with feeling, and shaped with imagination, differs from all other similar ideas that have been, or ever will be, conceived by the same individual mind, or any other individual art mind. Consequently, we have too few schools of art, which, by their very nature, are dogmatic, and have a narrowing, not to say a paralyzing, effect on the formative force of the artist. In the case of pictures, new methods of decorating their frames are quite as allowable as new methods of painting the picture itself. The office of a frame is certainly first to protect the picture, secondly, to remove it from its environments, and thirdly, in consonance with the principles of good taste, and the fitness of things, the frame should be a completion of the idea the artist has placed upon the canvas. If not so, then frames are in their very nature obstructive, and imprison the thought the painter has expressed on his canvas, with a broad, unmeaning belt of gold, or flat slab of wood, thus checking the expression made on the spectator's mind, which is a gross anachronism, and an offence to cultivated taste. Nine times out of ten, gold frames are a mistake. We place a landscape as dark perhaps as Rembrandt, or a dark portrait, in a bright gilt frame, and because the eye has become accustomed to such an offence from long usage, we accept it without demur. The artist with his best skill carefully arranges the light and shade of his picture so that proper harmony and relief are obtained, and then finds the effect of his picture, which he has wrought with such intelligent labor, completely upset by seeing his work surrounded with something that has nothing whatever in common with it. All interference with any established custom, be it right or wrong, will arouse opposition. Why frames should be any less pictorial than the pictures themselves, is incomprehensible. A plain frame without any pictorial effects in harmony with the picture itself, is the worst of all contrasts, and is the kind of frame that plainly says, this is but a picture. Of course, the idea in the picture is the only thing that truly exists as far as the work of art is concerned, the mere canvas and pigment being in no way any part of the idea of the artist. It does not matter anything, whether the bars in front of the caged lion are of paint or brass, so long as they symbolize the idea the artist wishes to represent. It is much better that the internal plastic and organizing force in the brain of the artist that created the picture, should not stop short at the frame, but go on to make use of the wood or other materials composing the same, that will constitute a framing in harmony with the idea of the picture subject, or in symbolizing surroundings entirely in harmony with the idea of the picture. This is a much better idea than to overlay the wood of the frame with a gilt composition in a fussy and glaring style that calls attention to itself instead of the picture. All relief on a picture frame should be carved out of the solid material.

Of course, it is just as easy to decorate the frame in a rampant fashion, as it is to paint a bad picture. The design in the picture may be either simple or decorative, but whichever it is, the motive should be continued in an unassuming fashion in the frame. Strong contrast is not wanted between a picture and its frame, but rather a mere subsidence, or finish of the painting, and one which should as little as possible, in color or otherwise, disturb the mind in the contemplation of the artist's design.